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ABSTRACT

Because of the recent Lau vs. Nichols decision by the Supreme Court, school districts will be looking for various instruments to determine language functionality in bilingual students. Nine tests are reviewed: the Leiter International Performance Scale (LIPS), the Michigan Oral Language Productive Tests Structured Response, the Michigan Oral Language Productive Test, the El Paso Public School Oral Language Dominance Measure, the Bilingual Syntax Measure, three Functional Tests of Oral Proficiency, the Oral Placement Test for Adults, and the Skoczylas Bilingual Tests and Measures. Each is described briefly, and its strengths and weaknesses are listed. (BW)

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# A DESCRIPTION AND AN ANALYSIS OF TESTS FOR THE BILINGUAL CHILD

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## Foreward

Because of the recent Lau vs. Nichols descision by the United States Supreme Court, school districts will be looking for various instruments to determine language functionality. These analyses were prepared to help administrators, counselors, and teachers in the determination of a child's language proficiency.

These tests should not be employed as the ultimate determiner of the child's placement in any program, but the tests can be used as a part of the assessment. For example, to classify a child as a "predominant Spanish speaker" because he has some problems in English pronunciation would be a misuse of any English phonemic test. Nevertheless, knowing that a child demonstrates some Spanish interference in his English pronunciation is an important clue that should be considered when such an assessment is made.

This compendium is offered as a ready reference for these tests.

New Mexico State Department of Education
Bilingual Teacher Training Unit

# A Description and an Analysis of Tests for the Bilingual Child

## 1. The Leiter International Performance Scale:

The Leiter International Performance Scale (LIPS) is an objective test designed originally for deaf children in order to determine their mental age. The test does not measure verbal proficiency as such, but it does attempt to measure the child's ability to reason beginning with discrimination of colors and shapes and proceeding through a variety of tests of analogy, similarities, and estimation of numbers and density.

The test is administered on a one-to-one basis, with the average time for administering and scoring the examination one-half hour. The test must be administered in a place which is quiet and removed from the classroom environment. Since the test does attempt to be a predictive measurement, it should be administered by a competent examiner.

ASSESSMENT: The test's greatest strength is its ability to measure a child's reasoning abilities without using any language as such. It is, therefore, possible for the administrator to give the test to a child whose first language is different from the administrator's. However, in order for the test to be most effective, it is better if the administrator can speak the language of the child. Scoring the exam is relatively simple if the tester follows the instruction manual carefully. A workshop in which administrators of the exam both take and administer the examination several times, in order to become familiar with it, should be sufficient to guarantee that the test is administered correctly.

LIMITATIONS: Despite the test's attempt to be non-verbal, it is not, as one would hope, entirely culture-free. For example, the very first test is a color discrimination - one, but two of the colors are blue and green. In Navajo, these two colors are designated by the same word dootł'izh, thus the child may not discriminate between these two colors which would be more recognizable to the English or Spanish-speaking child. Several other tests also have apparent cultural bias, such as matching the bottoms of uniforms of a policeman and a soldier (which the child may never have seen) and other clothing categories in which the woman's hat looks closer to the broad-brimmed, Western hat commonly worn by Navajo men than the Fedora which is supposed to be associated with the man.

The LIPS cost is expensive ($270.00 in 1969), but this cost is justified in a district with a high rate of bilingual students whose mental age needs to be determined.

2. Michigan Oral Language Productive Tests Structured Response (ACTFL Edition 1970)

The Michigan Oral Language Productive Tests are designed to test speaking production with listening comprehension, in order to assess the child's ability to produce phonologically and grammatically standard English. This examination is designed primarily for four to six-year old Spanish speakers who are learning English as a second language. The test measures language interference, and thus can be used as a diagnostic examination.

This examination is administered on a one-to-one basis, with the examiner showing the child a series of three pictures. The administrator shows the child several objects in the picture and then tries to elicit a specified structure from him. The test must be administered in a quiet room separate from the classroom and takes 15 minutes.

ASSESSMENT: Since the examination is a "discreet-point approach," that is, it measures linguistic features, it is an excellent tool for evaluating a student's weaknesses in English production. Thus it becomes especially useful to the teacher in evaluating areas which need further concentration for classroom work. Because of the structured nature of the stimuli, and the detailed point system for scoring, the scorer need not have extensive training in administering this test beyond a reasonably good awareness of English phonology and syntax.

Items are presented clearly and each objective is clear as to what response is expected.

LIMITATIONS: The major difficulty with this test is that the pictures which are supposed to serve as stimuli, are poorly printed. First of all, they are all in black and white, thus they are less attractive to a child of four to six. Often vocabulary items which are used in the questions are not shown in the picture, which makes the vocabulary, an item not being tested, more important than it should be. For example, the child is shown a picture of a family eating fish, some of which are so vague and minute that they are hard to discern. The child is then told that the little boy in the picture likes hot dogs better than he does fish, but there are no hot dogs present in the picture for the child to see. Glasses are present on the table, and the examiner is to tell the child that the boy wants more milk; yet again there is nothing in the picture to reveal that there is any milk present. The difficulty of the items being tested do not seem to follow any order of difficulty. The present perfect tense, generally considered a fairly sophisticated concept is presented in the fourth question, yet the last item (question number 43) is a simple subject-verb agreement question. Cultural items as well as linguistic items are sensitive to the Spanish speaking child, but may contain items outside the knowledge of some Navajo or other traditionally-oriented Native American child. The child is expected to discuss items connected with fishing, yet according to Miss Silentman, SDE Navajo Specialist, Navajos generally do not eat fish. The test also expects the child to distinguish between shirts and

blouses, but sexual distinctions among Navajos in clothing are not made until the child is six or seven years old.

3. Michigan Oral Language Productive Test: Conceptual Oral Language Test's major purpose is designed to test non-verbal reasoning ability while at the same time testing the child's oral production ability. The test is designed as a summary measure for children in the first, second, and third grades, and it is aimed at indicating the child's handicaps in English.

The test is administered on a one-to-one basis, with the examiner showing the child a series of pictures in which the child is expected first to point out his choice and then explain why he chose the one he did. As with the Structured Response test, this examination should be administered in a quiet room and takes about thirty minutes to administer. The test has four formats covering math, science and social studies; with one format devoted to differentiation, one to classification, another to seriation and the final one to analogies. Two criteria are employed in judging the adequacy of the response: the generality of the response and the appropriateness of the response "standard classroom English." In order to receive a score of 2 both criteria of generality and usage must be judged as 2. A score of 1 is given if either criteria is judged as 1. A verbal response is scored 0 if either or both are judged as 0.

ASSESSMENT: Since the major objective of this exam is to determine the discrepancy between the child's non-oral reasoning ability and his ability to express himself in English, this exam could possibly be used as a diagnostic tool; but because of the difficulty in scoring the exam, the poor quality of the printing of the illustrations and the cultural bias of the exam towards urban experience, the test does not appear to be a good tool for New Mexico schools.

LIMITATIONS: The criteria for scoring this examination appears most difficult. The administrator is expected to delineate between what the examination terms "descriptive" responses and "categorical," or abstract responses; yet, the suggested responses appear limiting, doctrinaire and sometimes arbitrary. For example, test Item 45, a sequence test, shows in the first picture a woman looking into an empty cupboard. The next picture (which the child must supply from a choice of three) shows the woman shopping in a supermarket. The third picture shows the woman cooking and the final one shows the family eating. The child is then asked why he chose the picture of the woman shopping. If he replies, "she needs food" or "she has to buy food," his score is worth two points. But, if the child replies, "she doesn't have any food, so she buys some" his score is only one point. The manual's argument that the child needs to use the words "needs" or "has to" in order to achieve the maximum level of abstraction. Yet no cue for this response is given; and since "she doesn't have any food, so she buys some" demonstrates a cause-effect relationship, the difference in scoring appears arbitrary. The test then demands that the examiner have a most sophisticated sense of levels of abstraction or reply on the manual's response, which appears sometimes specious.

Like the structure test, the illustrations are all done in black and white and the execution is poor; certain objects such as coins, watches and faces are sometimes difficult to discern. Finally the COLT is aimed at a child with mainly urban experience. Questions require knowledge of uniformed firemen and mailmen, fairly sophisticated musical instruments and ships, all of which might be alien to a child from a rural New Mexican community.

(The cost of both the Structured Response and the Conceptual Oral Language Test is $5.00).

PAL--Primary Acquisition of Language

4. The El Paso Public School Oral Language Dominance Measure (by Rosa Apodaca).

The El Paso Public School Oral Language Dominance Measure is a speaking production with listening comprehension test. This examination has the purpose of determining the child's dominant language through the analysis of the child's syntax. It can be used also as an instrument for placement if it is used along with other criteria. The test is administered on a one-to-one basis and is aimed at children five and six years old. The test can be administered in approximately seven minutes. The administrator should be able to speak and write both English and Spanish and be sufficiently competent linguistically to distinguish syntactic items from lexical and phonological ones. Scoring is moderately complex and requires some instruction and practice.

ASSESSMENT: This oral dominance exam's most outstanding feature is its brevity. The stimuli are brightly colored cartoon-like prints, which are clearly executed. The examination encourages the child to speak freely before the actual scoring begins; however, once the scoring begins, the response is expected to be rather structured, sometimes without a sufficiently clear cue.

LIMITATIONS: Scoring is quite complex; each sentence has a different value (ease index), and the justification for some scoring methods appears questionable. For example, one of the pictures depicts a small girl and a larger boy tugging over a hot dog. Beside them is a dog excitedly waiting for them to drop it. The examiner then asks, "What would happen if they dropped the hot dog?" The response given as an example is: "He broke it." Besides the error in pronoun agreement (which isn't pointed out in the discussion), the manual suggests that not only did it not include the modal "should" but also that the tense of the verb should be "break" instead of "broke." Yet the error is only one error in the verb phrase, not two; for "should break" must be looked upon as one utterance (modal + tense + verb) just as broke would be considered one utterance (verb + tense). The fact that the lexical choice is "break" for a hot dog falling on the ground appears to be a most unusual choice for the example, whether in English or as a type of lexical interference in Spanish.

Since all three pictures depict an urban-suburban playground replete with a drinking fountain, a slide, a teeter-totter, they would not be within the experience of rural children who are either speakers of Spanish or Native American languages.

5. Bilingual Syntax Measure by Mariana K. Burt, Heidi C. Dulay, Eduardo Hernandez Ch.; Harcourt, Brace and Javonovich, Inc.

The Bilingual Syntax Measure (BSM) is a speaking production with listening comprehension test. It is designed to measure a child's oral proficiency in English and/or Spanish grammatical structures by using the child's natural speech rather than structured responses. The test can thus measure language dominance with respect to syntax, as well as serve as a means of diagnosis of the child's syntax. The "Child's Response Booklet" is excellent for the questions are written giving great ease in administering the test. This test designed for children ages four through nine (grades K-3), is administered on a one-to-one basis and takes between ten and fifteen minutes to give. The administrator should be able to write and speak both English and Spanish. Scoring the test, however, does require some practice which can be learned in a brief workshop.

ASSESSMENT: BSM is an attractive test: the stimuli consists of brightly colored, amusing cartoons the final series being a joke which should delight the child. The tests encourage the child to relax and enjoy the experience by having the child "chat" about each of the pictures before recording any of his responses, thus helping them to overcome difficulties in syntactic language interference rather than making the child anxious. Scoring tends to be realistic in appraising the child's oral capabilities by recognizing that the child may speak in phrases, use idiomatic expressions, pronounce in his own dialect or employ slang without being penalized. It can be also used along with other criteria for placement. The Spanish part of the examination can be used to ascertain the degree of maintenance or loss of the child's original Spanish once he has to be exposed to the potentially more dominant language of English in his school.

LIMITATIONS: Most questions contain an implied English/Spanish contrast; therefore, this examination may not be helpful in working with children from Native American backgrounds. The test proposes to be nothing more than a syntax measure, which may be seen as a limitation, but could also be viewed as its greatest strength. It can be also used along with other criteria for placement.

(The cost of the kit is $45.00)

6. Three Functional Tests of Oral Proficiency by Bernard Spolsky, Penny Murphy, Wayne Holme and Allen Farrel.

Spanish-English Language Dominance Test is a listening comprehension/speaking production test. It requires two persons to administer it and takes approximately twenty minutes. It is designed to permit a relatively untrained test administrator to arrive at some general classifications of the child's language ability. The major theory, which is most cogently argued, is that bilingual dominance varies from situation to situation. Thus, the language the child uses in the home may be different from his language in the neighborhood, and both of these may be different from the language he feels most comfortable with in the environment of the school, particularly if the natural bias in the school is toward English. The interview falls into three main sections; each of which has a Spanish and English component. The first part of the interview is a series of questions about the child's language experience, based on the belief that the child's report of his own language use is likely to be quite accurate. The first part is constructed also to ascertain the child's fluency intwo languages. The second part contains four word naming tasks, two calling for nouns and two for verbs covering the domains of the home, neighborhood and school. (For example, the child is asked to name all he can see or do in such a place as the kitchen or the yard.) The third part of the exam asks the child to describe what he sees in some pictures, from which two three-minute tape recordings are made as samples. This part of the examination is necessary, say the authors, to later check the child's progress as well as his initial placement.

ASSESSMENT: The use of two persons to administer the interview appears most reasonable, for the one person does the interviewing and the other does the recording. Thus the child is never made to feel anxious about having the interviewer write down what he is saying. The assessment of the various environs of the child to discover where he uses which language also appears most reasonable. The ease of scoring and the relatively simple kinds of analysis permit linguistically unsophisticated people to administer the test without forcing them into making judgements which they may not be equipped to make. The use of the tape recorder appears as an excellent tool for measuring progress from the initial interview to later in the school year.

LIMITATIONS: This test is not designed as a diagnostic measure, and it is not, therefore, helpful in evaluating instruction in language instruction. At no point, are discreet aspects of the language, such as syntax or pronounciation used for judging the child's language ability. But again, as the authors state, they are not attempting a diagnostic test to determine the child's weaknesses in one language or another; but they are interested in how the child can function in several settings. Finally, the test is still in the experimental stages. No set illustrations accompany this exam, and the administrators are expected to supply appropriate pictures as stimuli. Nevertheless, the exam is based on solid argument that functioning within a language is far more important than any single discreet aspect of the language such as phonology or syntax.

7. Three Functional Tests of Oral Proficiency by Spolsky, Murphy, Holme and Farrel.

The Navajo-English Dominance Interview is a listening comprehension/speaking production test for rating six-year old children on language dominance. The interview requires two bilingual interviewers: one to use only Navajo, and the other to use only English. There are three blocks of questions: the first asks the child his clan and that of his father's. Then the child is asked what his name is and where he lives. Finally the child is asked if he has siblings in school; if so, what are their names and how well he knows English and Navajo. Because of the particularities of Navajo culture, examiners found that the interview was most successful when the questions were evolved into general conversation rather than any formal set of questions. Since the intent of the interview is to assess how well the child functions within the respective languages, interviewers have found that training sessions were extremely valuable in learning to word the questions in Navajo and in practicing administering the test on one another. Many of the interviewers expressed a desire to have further practice with children before they confronted children who were new to the school situation.

ASSESSMENT: This interview was developed to provide validity data on teacher rating rather than to serve as the sole means of placement of a child into a given area of bilingual education. Rapport was found to more important than any single question. Because the Navajo child is taught to be quiet as a means of respect for his elders, interviewers found that if good rapport were not established, the child might not produce enough speech for the interviewers to assess his language abilities. The use of two interviewers, like the Spolsky Spanish-English Dominance Interview, is a good means of alleviating anxiety on the part of the child.

LIMITATIONS: This examination is not designed as a diagnostic measure; therefore, it is not capable of evaluating discreet aspects for language instruction. As is stated above, and admitted by the authors, if the child is at all reserved, the test may not provide enough extended speech sequences to evaluate his language ability.

8. Oral Placement Test for Adults.

Although the Oral Placement Test for Adults is not a major concern of these analyses, it is useful as a prototype of a test in determining levels of proficiency for basic adult education. Again, like the other two tests mentioned above, it tries to determine a person's ability to use English as a functional tool by having as an underlying question to each of its three blocks: Can this person function in English in this given situation? The test is designed for Spanish speakers and measures phonological and syntactic interference with the intention of discovering whether interference is serious enough to prevent communication. The test is simple to administer and relatively brief. If the person cannot complete the first block, he can then be classified at that level of competence. If he can answer all the questions in the first block, but not in the second block, he is then classified in that level, and so on.

9. Skoczylas Bilingual Tests and Measures.

1. The English Phonemic Unit Production Test is an oral production test, measured through repetition of spoken utterances. The test measures phonemic interference from Spanish to English. Since the test makes no attempt in measuring comprehension, it can be used with people from kindergarten to adults. The test is given on a one-to-one basis. Scoring is simple with ratings from 0 for no response, 1 for poor, and 2 for a good response. The phonemes to be tested are printed in bold type, making them easy to identify. A native English-speaker with minimal knowledge of phonetics could administer this test. It takes about eight minutes to administer.

ASSESSMENT: The test is a good diagnostic measure of segmental phonemic interference: it does not measure the supra-segmental phonemes nor independent production or comprehension.

LIMITATIONS: The test as measured above, is limited to measuring the segmental phonemes, but it appears inadvisable as any sort of proficiency or placement measurement. Someone with a "good ear" for sounds would be able to score well on this test without having any knowledge of the language. On the other hand, someone with a marked dialect, or with minor problems in language interference could receive a low score while being quite knowledgeable and able to function in English.

2. The Spanish Phonemic Unit Production Test is the counterpart to the test mentioned above. The description, assessment, and limitations are almost the same as that of the English one. The only exception is that this test takes only five minutes to administer.

3. The Home Bilingual Usage Estimate is a language inquiry used to determine language dominance by interviewing the person (or in the case of small children, the parents) in order to discover where the person uses English or Spanish. The test may be used to measure language maintenance by the individual (given at various intervals in the course of the academic year), or to measure language maintenance by various groups or changes in language dominance from one generation to another. The test takes approximately six minutes and can be administered by a bilingual aide.

ASSESSMENT: The test has several aspects which would recommend it in Lau assessments. It appears especially good in determining both the home language and the dominant language of the child. It does not, however, allow for direct observation of the child in social settings, which the Lau assessment requires. Since it is an interview rather than a test, the administrator need not be specially trained, nor does the administrator have to be linguistically sophisticated.

LIMITATIONS: As mentioned above, no observation of the child is necessary, and informants, whether an older child or parents anxious to give the right impression, may tend to give a distorted picture of the language used in the home. (This type of information is especially true when the informant believes that speaking English is more respectable.) The scoring process tends to be more complex, perhaps than is necessary. (Distinctions are made between what the child speaks with cousins and what the child speaks with playmates; what the child speaks with aunts and uncles and what the child speaks with babysitters.)

Copies can be obtained from:

R. V. Skoczylas
7350 Dowdy Street
Gilroy, California 93020

English Phonemic Unit Production Test
Scoring sheet and directions - set of 30--------$2.50

Spanish Phonemic Unit Production Test
Scoring sheet and directions - set of 30--------$2.50

Home Bilingual Usage Estimate
Set of 30 forms----------$3.50

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